

The Jewel Worshiper

BY VARICK VANARDY

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"I have put Pincher on the trail of Baxter and Marline. He will telephone in after seven tonight. Whatever he may have to say pass it on to Feltner. I am particularly anxious to know if either of those bulls should go to see Bobcat Rickett."

Ten minutes later Crewe went out. He turned northward, walking with his customary swiftness, but when half-way across Washington Square he wheeled abruptly and started even more swiftly upon the back track.

Another man who had also been moving rapidly, half halted, then continued on his way; but Crewe stopped him by stepping directly in front of him.

"You are a new man at the bureau, aren't you?" he asked. "I don't seem to remember you. But, anyhow, it isn't worth your while to try to follow me. You would lose. Besides, it isn't healthy. You might catch the malaria—or something."

The "shadow" grinned appreciatively.

"You might take me along with you," he said. "It would save us both a lot of trouble—and I'm willing to be soaked."

"Oh, I see! You are another one of that bunch, are you? You are playing with fire, young man, and you'll burn your fingers if you don't look out."

"Oh, I guess I know how to avoid the flames, Crewe. You see I—"

He stopped, for Crewe had wheeled and left him, and the would-be sleuth saw him enter a waiting taxi which drove rapidly away upon the instant when the door was banged shut; and he could not follow because there was no other taxi in sight.

The taxi, as it happened, was Crewe's personal property; and the chauffeur who drove it—well, he also belonged to Crewe. That strange man had many possessions of the sort in and around New York, and he was constantly adding to them.

The taxicab was driven as rapidly as the city ordinances permitted to a far up-town station of the subway, and the attention of the chauffeur seemed to be attracted to the opposite side of the street when his "fare" stepped down and slammed the door.

At all events the passenger disappeared in the subway before the man turned his head again, and even then he had already started his car forward.

Less than one hour later, or, to be exact, at seven o'clock, Birge Moreaux, portrait artist, in full evening dress, paused at the door of his studio before going out, to give some last directions to his man Feltner.

"Keep your ears open for the telephone, Feltner," he said, "and be especially particular in regard to the reports you receive. If you should want me, I will be at the home of Mr. Delorme until ten, and at the club after that until twelve. Then I shall return here unless I satisfy you otherwise."

Quite contrary to his habit he turned toward the rear of the building when he stepped from the elevator and left it by the Nameless Street door. He did so because it was his intention to walk to his destination, for the exercise it would afford, and it was a trifle more convenient to go out that way.

He was glad he did so.

Standing at the curb, facing the building and apparently studying its architecture, was the shadow who had attempted to follow Crewe across Washington Square, and beside him was Detective Sam Bunting.

The latter came forward at once, and he grasped the hand which Moreaux extended in greeting.

"Good evening, Mr. Moreaux," he said in his hearty manner. "Please don't think that I was spying on you, or the building, either, for that matter. Muchmore is around the corner on an errand for the chief, and I was waiting for him. But I would have gone in to see you for a moment if it had not been for the engagement with you at ten-thirty tonight."

"Oh, I hadn't a thought of your spying upon me, Bunting!" the artist returned smiling. "Who is that other chap?"

"He is a new man at the bureau, although several years on the force. Painter—that's his name—undertook to trail Crewe this afternoon and lost him. He has heard somehow—Muchmore didn't tell him nor I—that Crewe sometimes visits this building by this entrance, and he is so mad to think that Crewe gave him the slip that he says he is going to stand right there until Crewe comes, or until it is time for him to go to his South Fifth Avenue place again."

"Oh, I see! Did you have something that you particularly wished to say to me—that you thought of calling upon me just now instead of waiting until our evening engagement?"

"Yes, I did. And I hope you won't think me officious or fresh when I do say it, Mr. Moreaux."

"Certainly not, Bunting. What is it?"

"I don't know what your relations with Crewe are, Mr. Moreaux, and I don't care to know. I want you to believe that. But I do know that practically the entire detective bureau has been given the tip to 'get' him, if he can be 'got'."

"And so—here is where Mr. Fresh Buttinski comes in—I felt like passing the tip on to you. I thought perhaps you might think it would be just as well if you had nothing more to do with that man—for the present at least. I speak as an officer to a citizen, and, if you will permit me to say it, as one who wishes to be your friend."

"Shake hands, Bunting. That's the way of it! I appreciate it, too. But for your own enlightenment I will tell you that Crewe is not at all likely to appear at this door again—for some time to come, anyhow. You know I have the key that you took from him."

"You might put your friend wise and spare him the fatigue of standing up all night. Do not think that you presumed in giving me the warning. I am really very much obliged to you. I will look for you and Muchmore at the club at ten-thirty to-night."

"We will be there."

"Do, for I expect to have something of considerable importance to tell you."

But as Moreaux hurried on his way his thought, if uttered aloud, would have been:

"I wonder if Bunting was lying. If so he played the part all right."

CHAPTER X.

No Matter Who the Thief May Be.

"Mr. Delorme," said Moreaux—the two men faced each other across the library table in that small room which was called the "den"—I asked for this short talk with you when I telephoned two hours ago because I had an important question to ask you—one which may prove to be of grave importance."

"Very well, Birge. But surely you don't have to request interviews with me. Nobody is more welcome at my house than you are. The latch-string is always out to you."

"I know that, sir, and thank you heartily for it."

"What is the all-important question?"

"Before asking it I will preface it by a short statement."

"Well? Well? Go ahead."

"I have felt very much concerned about the disappearance of those jewels of Lorna's; more so than you have, I imagine. At all events, I promised Lorna that I would do my utmost to have them restored to her."

"That is very kind of you, Birge. Lorna prizes such things highly—and, incidentally, she thinks that you are about the salt of the earth."

"In order to keep my promise to her I have, in one way and another, engaged the services of several others."

"Detectives, I suppose? I'm sorry. I did not wish to have the affair noised abroad."

"Detectives—and some others who are not exactly detectives, and it will not be noised abroad, Mr. Delorme."

"I am glad of that. Please go on."

"Inquiry, deduction, thought, careful analysis, and some abstract investigation in different quarters have collectively convinced me that it will not be a difficult matter to recover the lost articles. The question is this: Do you want those lost jewels returned, without regard to the identity of the person who took them?"

"Most certainly I do."

"No matter who the — the thief may prove to be?"

"The answer is the same, Birge."

"Do you recall our conversation at the breakfast table this morning?"

"Every bit of it, word for word."

"Then I have your authority to go ahead with a free hand, without fear or favor, no matter upon whom the burden of guilt may fall?"

"You have. But, for Heaven's sake, why all this mystery? If you know where the jewels are and who took them, why don't you out with it and tell me?"

"I DON'T know—yet."

"Oh, I see. You are surmising—guessing."

"But I have got three guesses, Mr. Delorme, according to the old style of playing the game. And one of them is sure to win. And whichever one wins, or rather, no matter which one of the three may win, the resultant consequence will be—let us say—unpleasant."

"You insinuate, Birge, that somebody whom I know and know well, is the guilty person?"

"It is more than an insinuation, sir. It is a statement."

"Why don't you tell me the names of all three of your 'guesses'?"

"For the specific reason that such a course would be a decided injustice to the two who are innocent."

"I had not thought of that. Well, go ahead in your own way, Birge. No matter who the guilty party may be, I have no sympathy for him, or her, as the case may develop. The one who is guilty should be exposed; if not publicly, then, at least, to the few who ought to know about it."

"Very good, sir." Moreaux left his chair, helped himself to a fresh cigar from the open box on the table, lighted it, shook hands with Mr. Delorme, who had also risen, crossed to the door, then turned about and said:

"Oh, by the way, are you attending the Netherlands Society dinner tomorrow night?"

"Yes. Aren't you? You're a member."

"Oh, I shall doubtless be there—unless something happens in the meantime to prevent."

"Bless me! You talk as if you were a man of business, and I never knew anybody who had more leisure on his hands. Do you know, Birge"—whistfully—"I used to wish that when my Lorna chose a husband it would be you. Forgive an old man for saying it, but I have wished it many times."

Moreaux's tall form seemed to grow perceptibly taller, and the expression in his eyes was serious indeed, notwithstanding his smile as he replied quickly:

"Good Heavens, Delorme, I am twice as old as she is. She is nineteen and I am thirty-eight. That would never do, you know. Such a thought never occurred to Lorna, fond as she was, and is, of me."

"But it occurred to you more than once, Birge. I know."

"Nonsense, Mr. Delorme. Nonsense. Gracious! I must go. Good night, sir."

Promptly at half past ten o'clock the two officers, Muchmore and Bunting, arrived at the club where Birge Moreaux was waiting them.

He conducted them at once to a secluded corner, offered them refreshments, which they accepted, and having lighted cigars all around, the artist looked quizzically at Muchmore and inquired:

"Well, lieutenant, what's doing?"

"We supposed that our errand here was to have your reply to that question, Mr. Moreaux," was the quick reply.

"Still, you have something on your mind. I can see that much. Before I unbossom myself, suppose you tell me what has happened to interest you today."

"Very well, sir. Nothing of any importance. And I really am not sure that I ought to tell you about it."

"I think you may trust me, Lieutenant."

"I will. You gave me a tip last night about a Mephistophelian looking chap that you had seen talking with another man in the Bowery near Houston Street. After I accompanied Mr. Delorme to headquarters I went over to Crewe's just to look around a bit, and he was there. I had hoped it out who he was in the meantime. He calls himself Sindahr, the miracle worker."

"Ah, yes. I have heard of him."

"It isn't necessary to tell you all that happened. When I first went inside I took a good look at him, and one of the things I saw was a few traces of some sort of preparation which he had evidently been using to make his hair white, or gray."

"It was under his hair, along the back of his neck; just a trace of it, but enough to set me thinking. I decided to arrest him as a suspicious character and hold him for investigation, and so, put the cuffs on him. Later, he managed to get away; but that doesn't matter. I can get him again when I want him."

"I see."

"The point is this: there were things about him that jogged my memory, but I could not put my finger on them, so to speak. But the thought has been hankering around in my cranium the whole blessed day, and—half an hour ago I met him on the street in his other character, and I'll be blown if he didn't have the gall to stop me and speak to me. I got his measure then, all right."

"I am still very much in the dark, Lieutenant," Moreaux said mildly.

"Do you recall a Count Sinduhr who was at the wedding reception?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the guy."

"You don't tell me! Did you arrest him again?"

"Not by a jugful. I pretended that I was mightily glad to see him again, asked him for his card, got it, and sent him on his way rejoicing. He's the thief, or I'm only a constable. But getting doesn't mean getting the stolen jewels. He's got to be stalked."

"That is very interesting, Lieutenant. You do not intend to arrest him at once, then, even if you should see him again in the character of Sindahr?"

"No. I'll let him have his head for two or three days. But I will ask the inspector to put three of our best men on him so that every move he makes will be known."

"Well, well. Your information is somewhat of a squelcher upon what I intended to suggest, although I don't suppose it will really make any difference after all."

"What was it, Mr. Moreaux?" the Lieutenant requested eagerly; and Bunting bent forward in his chair and asked at the same time: "Please tell

us what it is, sir."

"You were both rather eager last night to understand exactly what were the relations between that man Crewe and myself. And this evening Mr. Bunting was kind enough to give me a warning concerning him. The fact is, gentlemen, it has been my good or ill fortune to perform a service for Crewe in the past, and he is not one who forgets."

"He remembers both ways, good and bad," Bunting remarked quietly.

"We will say, then, that recalling his promises of service to me, I asked him to assist in the recovery of the lost jewels. The point is this—and we will forget the source of my information, if you please. That is part of the contract."

"Certainly."

"The descriptions of the wedding presents in the newspapers has excited the cupid of every crook in the city. Many of them suppose the presents to be still contained in Mr. Delorme's house. It is to be burglarized tomorrow night."

"Wait, please, until I have finished. Mr. Delorme will not be at home if he keeps an engagement he has made; but he may not keep it. At all events, I shall be there, or if not inside of the house, near at hand."

"Do you know the time planned for the burglary, Mr. Moreaux?" Bunting asked.

"Yes; I am coming to that. But understand me, it would not do for either of you to be in the immediate neighborhood on the watch. The lookout would spot you. I was especially warned against that."

"Well, what then?"

"I will be there, probably inside of the house, watching, whether Delorme is there or not. Around the corner in Madison Avenue, a block and a half away, there is an undertaker's establishment kept by a man named Grover."

"If you two officers will promise to wait there, inside of that shop, with patience, from half past one until I call you on the telephone, you will catch red-handed whoever the burglars may be—and it is possible, just possible, that there will be other developments. Now what do you both say?"

"Don't you think that you run an unnecessary risk?" Bunting began.

"Not at all. The telephone is so located that I won't be heard using it."

"Mr. Moreaux is right. His way is the best way, Bunting. It is your job, and we will do as you say, Mr. Moreaux," Muchmore said decisively.

"Good. Then it is settled that you will both be at the undertaker's at half past one tomorrow night, and will remain there, inside, until I call you on the telephone?"

"Yes."

"And also that in the meantime not another person than ourselves—not even your own chief—shall be told anything at all about it? I must insist upon that, too."

"Certainly," Muchmore replied. "We would much rather work this out ourselves than to have half a dozen unnecessary men detailed to assist."

"Remember, I do not know the exact time. It may be an hour, or even more, before I call you on the phone," Moreaux cautioned.

"We will wait at the undertaker's till you do call, if it takes until daylight," Muchmore replied; and Bunting nodded his acquiescence to that statement.

CHAPTER XI.

The Delicate Hand of Crewe.

The following night was a busy one for Crewe; also for officers Baxter and Marline; likewise for some others in whom we are more or less interested.

The "business" part of it, so far as we are concerned, began a few minutes before twelve, when the front door at Crewe's opened just a little and the sinister visage of Sindahr, the miracle worker, appeared in the aperture, his black eyes scanning the face of every person in the place. Then he glided swiftly to the bar behind which Crewe was standing.

"I don't want those two cops to come in and find me here," he said rapidly and uneasily.

"Go into the back room and wait there," Crewe replied. "I will bring your cordial to you presently."

"I brought those stick-pins and things to you last night. You weren't here. I gave them to Christy. Did he tell you?"

"Yes."

Sindahr glided into the back room and closed the door after him.

Crewe selected a glass larger than the one from which Sindahr usually drank his native cordial. Into the bottom of it he dropped two small white pellets. Then he filled the glass to the brim with the cordial, placed the bottle itself upon a tray with the filled glass, and carried it into the back room.

"I shall be busy for a time, Sindahr," he said as he put the tray down on the table, "but I brought the bottle of cordial, in case you should want more before I return. You will be entirely safe in here."

He went out again—but at the end of twenty minutes he returned to the back room and found the miracle worker soundly asleep with his head resting on his arms upon the table.

Crewe opened the door into the hall. Then he turned about, lifted Sindahr from the chair and threw him across his shoulders as he might have done with a bag of meal. Five minutes later he deposited the sleeping man upon the bed in a room above the

saloon, and having arranged him in a comfortable position, went out, locking the door after him.

The key he gave to Christy, with a few whispered words of explanation, the closing words of which were: "It is entirely harmless, Christy. He will wake up tomorrow noon without the least sensation of having been doped. I had to do it in order to carry out my plans."

"Pincher just telephoned again," Christy remarked.

"Well?"

"Baxter and Marline have just gone into Bobcat Rickett's hide-out, in Fourth Street."

"Good. It is working all right."

"He and Cracker are both on the watch."

"Good again."

Over at Rickett's "hide-out," as Christy had called it, the yegg had been waiting since the early afternoon of the preceding day.

His nervousness and trepidation had increased with each hour he waited, because of the letter he had written and posted while on his way there from Crewe's, because of the certainty that Baxter, to whom the letter had been addressed, would appear there to see him; because Baxter had been such a long time in replying to it in person as had been requested, and because of the dire consequences that would follow if Crewe should arrive while Baxter was there and find them together.

And Bobcat felt certain that Crewe would show up that night, since he had not done so the preceding one.

Baxter made his appearance shortly after midnight, and Marline was with him.

They ascended the stairs softly, Baxter scratched against the door in a peculiar manner with his thumbnail, it opened instantly, and they passed inside into utter darkness. Nobody uttered a sound.

Baxter struck a match and lighted the gas. It revealed Bobcat Rickett standing with his back against the door, half-crouching, white and frightened.

"What time is it?" he demanded before either of the officers could speak.

"It's a quarter past twelve, or maybe a little more, Bobcat," Marline replied. "We've got time enough. We'll get out before he comes. Say, you're the yellowest stool-pigeon I ever knew."

"I ain't either. I'm only dead scared of Crewe. So are you, and so is Baxter, if anybody should ask you," was the quick retort.

"Well, drop that. Bax got your letter only about an hour ago, 'r we'd have been here last night. Where's this play goin' to be made? What's doin'?"

"I dunno what it is only that Crewe's comin' here as soon as he closes up, an' I'm to take my best and lightest tools with us when we go out."

"Didn't he let drop nothin' else?" Baxter demanded.

"No; so help me, he didn't. Just that. But you have promised me, Bax, and you, too, Mar, that if ever I could frame it so's to get anything on Crewe, you'd let up on me. Well, here is your chance."

"Crewe's goin' to do something to-night, 'r he wouldn't have made that date with me, would he? If you two bulls can't trail along and find out what is it, after what I've told you—that ain't my fault."

"What do you think of it, Mar?" Baxter asked his partner.

"It looks good to me, Bax," was the reply. "It's workin' out fine. We'll get Crewe tonight, and get him right. Say, Rickett, can't you stow one of us away somewhere? I'd like to hear what Crewe's got to say when he gets here."

The stool-pigeon's eyes dilated with terror.

"I wouldn't dast," he replied instantly. "I'd rather chuck the hull thing right now than do that. And anyhow Crewe won't say any more to me here than he said in his own bar-room."

"I won't know where we're goin' till we get there. That's a cinch. And 'r the love of Pete, get out now! He's likely to be here any minute. He's always ahead of time; that is his long suit. And say! If he should find you two bulls here with me—"

Words utterly failed the stool-pigeon. Terror at the very thought of such a climax appalled him.

The two officers could see that he was trembling and they grinned in appreciation of the fact. A policeman despises a stool-pigeon almost as intensely as a fellow crook hates one.

They nodded to each other and moved toward the door.

"We'll be there, wherever it is, about as soon as you are, Bobcat," Baxter said, and they passed outside. Pincher, on watch in a doorway opposite, saw them stop at a drug-store Marline waited while Baxter went inside and used a telephone.

What he said when he called up police headquarters was told to Moreaux the following day by the one official down there who knew his true character and work; but it is worth repeating here.

"We have always wanted to get our claws into Crewe," he told the man in charge of the desk. "The chance has arrived. Bobcat Rickett has been playin' 'stool' for Marlin an' me, but the snap is too big for us to play it alone. If you'll be on tap down there, and ready to move sudden when I call up again, we'll nail him tonight red-handed. He's goin' to pull off some thing, but whether it's Moreaux's studio 'r the park band, 'r the U. S.

sub-treasury, I don't know—yet. But, all the same, when I tap the wire again, you be ready to hump your selves."

Muchmore and Bunting were not at headquarters at the time, so they did not receive the telephoned information—which fact evidenced the delicacy of Crewe's scheming.

At ten minutes before one Crewe passed into the hallway of the house where Rickett lived, and he did not even glance in the direction of where he supposed Cracker might be hiding.

He knew that Baxter was somewhere near, watching. He knew that Baxter was called an expert "shadow," and would follow closely after Rickett and himself when they should appear—and that was precisely what he most desired.

A taxi—the same one he had used the preceding evening—had followed him to a point a hundred feet from Rickett's doorway. When he came from the house again accompanied by the Bobcat they stepped in it and were driven rapidly away.

But officer Marline had anticipated just such an emergency, and was seated in another one, half a block away. Baxter joined him instantly. The driver had already received his instructions.

The taxicab containing the two officers followed the other one which held Crewe and the yeggman.

Their destination we already know. Likewise the fact that the owner of the house was attending a banquet and so was not at home.

CHAPTER XII.

The Housebreakers.

Crewe entered the house at the front door, using one of the keys which Christy had procured for him.

Rickett wondered why he had been taken along, since there seemed to be no need for his "lightest kit." The time was approximately a quarter past one; rather an early hour for burglars to get busy.

Inside the house, when the door was closed behind them, Rickett's impatience got the best of him; and he demanded:

"What the blazes did you want of me an' my tools for, when you've got the keys?" Crewe put his lips close to the yegg's ear and whispered:

"If you utter another sound unless you're asked, I'll choke you into silence and leave you here."

There was a dim light in the foyer. Crewe led the way up the wide stairway, going forward, Rickett thought, if it were familiar with his surroundings and so came presently to a door which opened at his touch. Passing inside the room, Crewe closed and locked the door, and then snapped on the electric, flooding the apartment with brilliancy.

The yegg, accustomed to obscurity when he made his nocturnal calls at unfamiliar residences, started back in dismay, cowering.

"Don't do that," he whispered, forgetting the order not to speak unless spoken to; but Crewe seemed not to hear. He passed quickly on into an adjoining room and snapped on more lights.

It was the dressing-room of a young woman; a glance revealed that fact; but Crewe did not so much as glance toward the articles it contained, although Rickett found time to slip several gold-backed toilet articles into his capacious pockets.

Crewe led the way through a generous bath-room into a bedroom beyond it, where he snapped on more lights. Then he pointed to a small, square door, breast high in the wall at that side of the room nearest the bath-room.

"Tackle that, Bobcat," he said shortly. "It is made of steel, although the veneering is wood. It is fastened with a double-key lock, and it won't be easy. Tackle it, and be quick about it, too."

The Bobcat "tackled" it, and he was an expert at his profession. It was surprising, even to Crewe, how swiftly and how deftly he worked.

We need not describe the process nor his methods. In a marvelously short time, considering the difficulties, the small steel door gave way before his efforts and fell ajar, mutilated, but not beyond repair.

He turned with an expression of pride in his eyes, but Crewe shoved him ruthlessly aside without comment. Then he peered into the compartment, the interior of which had been thus disclosed.

There were many things there, some of undoubted value. Rickett, peering over Crewe's bent shoulders, rubbed his hands together and licked his lips expectantly.

(To Be Continued.)

Artificial ears are so skillfully made that they may with difficulty be distinguished from natural ones, so it is claimed.